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AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOTIONS OF NEGATION, FREEDOM
AND VALUE IN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

by



EMMA WYOMA PRICE

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis
entitled AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOTIONS OF NEGATION, FREEDOM AND VALUE IN
BEING AND NOTHINGNESS, submitted by Emma Wyoma Price in partial ful-
filment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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F O R G E O R G E

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether Jean-Paul Sartre, in his main philosophical work, Being and Nothingness, succeeds in his attempt to build a viable ontology, and, if so, whether or not an ethic can be derived from it.

With reference to this latter issue, we want to further show how Sartre established "nothingness"¹ as an absolute in his ontology intending to use it as the foundation for an objectivist ethic. This is a departure from the usual opinion of Sartrian commentators² that Sartre had intended to establish a subjectivist ethic.

Being and Nothingness is notorious for its difficult language, cumbersome style and frequent inconsistencies. However, we think it must still be respected as a novel and daring approach to the question of being. We also think that it is fair to make certain allowances for a pioneer such as Sartre that one would not make for those philosophers who stay within safe and well-defined boundaries.

We have decided to attack the problem we have set ourselves, as outlined above, by interpreting three key notions in Sartre's early thought -- those of negation, freedom and value. The first section of this thesis deals with the most carefully and fully developed notion of Being and Nothingness, Sartre's concept of negation.

We have chosen to analyze this particular concept for three reasons. First, we feel that a clear grasp of Sartre's concept of negation is the key to an understanding of his ontology. Secondly, we think that an understanding of what Sartre means by negation is an essential pre-requisite for any interpretation of his theories of freedom and value. Thirdly, we think that Sartre, in his analysis of negation, is at his best from a philosophical point of view. His reasoning is incisive and easy to follow -- quite unlike his usual ambiguous style.

In the second part of this paper, we subject Sartre's concepts of freedom and value to a critical examination. Our first task here is to elucidate the special meanings that Sartre gives to these terms.

Secondly, on the basis of this interpretation, we must decide whether Sartre's concepts of freedom and value are consistently derivable from his ontology. Thirdly, having discovered that Sartre employs these terms in a restricted way, we will attempt to determine whether this would affect their ability to support an ethic, the purpose Sartre envisaged for them.

The section in Being and Nothingness which Sartre devotes to his examination of freedom and value is particularly ambiguous. Therefore, in our analysis of these concepts, we often found it necessary to interpret certain passages according to our own understanding of Sartre because a liberal interpretation would have been incomprehensible or contradictory. We are aware that by introducing this subjective element into our analysis we risk attributing to Sartre's thought elements that he never meant to be there. We have tried to keep this error to a minimum. Our only justification for the use of this approach is that with a stylist like Sartre no other approach seems possible.

Sartre's primary object in Being and Nothingness was the development of an ontology -- a systematic analysis of the structures of being as they exist in the world. Sartre's search for the fundamental structures of being led him into a dualism which he characterized as "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself".

Being-for-itself is Sartre's designation for human consciousness. Sartre envisions it as empty, a nothingness. He considers its sole attribute to be its power to introduce this nothingness into the rest of the world.

Sartre refers to all the world outside of human consciousness as being-in-itself. Since the "for-itself"³ has been categorized as empty, it follows that being-in-itself encompasses the totality of substance. Sartre characterizes the "in-itself" as absolutely full and therefore powerless and immobile. A being which has as its essence simply identity with itself cannot move itself or actively enter into relationships. It follows that any change in the in-itself could only be effected through the activity of the for-itself since only these two

elements exist in Sartre's system.

Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself are so entirely different that it is hard to imagine how there could ever be any connection between them. Sartre succeeds in linking them together however through his use of the "intentional act".⁴ The theory of "intentionality" is rooted in Aristotle and was fully developed in medieval philosophy. A modified version of this theory became the basic tenet in the theory of phenomenology which was formalized by Sartre's mentor, Edmund Husserl.

Intentionality is based on the common sense observation that consciousness is always conscious of something. Consciousness is an act and as such it does not exist independently of the object of its "intentional activity". To act is always to act upon something. That is why Sartre had to attribute power, or "potency" as he poetically refers to it, to his notion of the for-itself. Without power, the for-itself would not be able to act upon the in-itself and there would be no possibility of a connection between the two categories.

The intentional act which links the for-itself to the in-itself generates a double contingency. Since "all consciousness is consciousness of", being-for-itself could not exist without the prior existence of being-in-itself. Since the for-itself is by definition empty it could only look to the in-itself for the object of its intention. However, there is an issue we must consider here, at least briefly. In his analysis of the for-itself, Sartre distinguishes between two types of conscious intention. On the basis of this distinction, he divides the for-itself into two categories, the "pre-reflective cogito" which performs ordinary acts of intention in relation to the objective world, and the "reflective cogito" whose special function is to focus on the for-itself in the act of "intending".

One might argue that this second type of reflection is independent of the external world and therefore not contingent upon being-in-itself. This is not the case, however. The "intentional act" is not stored in consciousness, which is empty, but only exists at the time of its

occurrence and, as we have already established, it can only occur in relation to an object. Therefore, any analysis of the intentional act must necessarily operate on the assumption of the prior existence of an intentional object.

The second contingency generated by the intentional act is an epistemological one affecting the in-itself. Since being-in-itself is completely full it cannot know itself. Knowledge is a relation and there can be no relation in a thing which is identity with itself. Therefore, being-in-itself is only known through being-for-itself.

While being-in-itself can only be known through being-for-itself, its existence is not contingent. By contrast, the for-itself is dependent upon the in-itself in both an ontological and an epistemological sense. Consciousness depends for its existence upon the prior existence of the objective world since consciousness, as intentionality, is only an act of relating to objects in this world. The for-itself also depends upon the in-itself for its knowledge of itself. Being-for-itself being empty is "transparent" to itself, as Sartre describes it. It can therefore only recognize itself through the act of intention by which it relates to being-in-itself. This necessitates the prior existence of an object for its intention and therefore of being-in-itself.

Since it is necessary for a thing to exist before it can be known, one can conclude that in Sartre's dualism of being and nothingness (consciousness) nothingness is grounded in being. But despite the priority of being over nothingness in his ontology, it is nothingness that Sartre considers as his absolute. A possible reason for this is that nothingness cannot be qualified in any way, and therefore it is not relative to anything else. That is to say, it relates but is not related to, since its complement, the in-itself, is inert.

It is the existence of an absolute in Sartre's ontology that makes the derivation of an objectivist ethic from it appear to be a possibility. Objectivist ethics depend upon a standard, a basis for comparison, which will make possible the determination of moral from immoral. Objectivist ethicists always encounter difficulties in

providing a foundation for this standard, however. If they are to avoid grounding it in feelings, which would place them in the Subjectivist camp, they must make an appeal to authority in the form of conscience, convention or God. However, because interpretations of these authorities vary and because there is no higher standard by which to assess these interpretations, Objectivists can never establish a firm, unequivocal position. Sartre's concept of nothingness, which he equates with absolute freedom, may provide the absolute necessary for a successful objectivist ethic. We shall later attempt to demonstrate that this is not the case, however.

It is our contention that the limitations of Sartre's ontology would have made it impossible for him to even attempt the development of a subjectivist ethic. Subjectivism, in the axiological sense, can be roughly described as

The doctrine that moral and aesthetic values represent the subjective feelings and reactions of individual minds and have no status independent of such reactions.⁵

Utilitarianism and ethical and psychological hedonism are examples of this approach. These theories all assume that morality is based on feelings. As such they still involve a comparison (of one feeling to another) and therefore a standard. There has to be some basis for weighing happiness against unhappiness, like against dislike. Since feelings are subjective they do not exist in the external world. But in Sartre's ontology neither can they exist in consciousness since this is empty. Sartre categorizes feelings as modes of the intentional act. We shall later demonstrate that as such they require particular objects and therefore cannot occur simultaneously on the grounds that Sartre's system does not allow for the simultaneous occurrence of attitudinal intentionalities. If such is the case then no comparison of states of consciousness would be possible since comparison depends upon the simultaneous presence of two or more objects (in this case, attitudes) to compare. Since this comparison is the very basis of the subjectivist ethics it would follow that it is not compatible with Sartre's ontology.

If neither an objectivist nor a traditional subjectivist ethic

is consistent with the Sartrian ontology, it seems fair to say that a normative ethic would not be possible in terms of his system. This is rather ironic. Sartre's system is based on a concept of freedom so radical as to allow for no external controls over human behaviour. Yet, again and again in the ethical passages of his works, he denies that choice is capricious and asserts the basic human need for solid values. It is apparent from this that Sartre would consider only a normative ethic worthwhile.

Our basic thesis, however, is that no ethic can be developed on the basis of Sartre's ontological position. Therefore, the fact that he would not be at all interested in the development of a non-normative ethic will not deter us from determining this possibility. We shall examine the basic non-cognitivist positions and also the positions of the major "good reasons" ethicists, Hare, Nowell-Smith, Toulmin and Baier. Once again, we hope to prove that Sartre's radical notion of freedom will render these positions irreconcilable with his own.

If neither objectivism, subjectivism nor imperativism are compatible with the Sartrian ontology, we think it is fair to conclude that no ethic could be developed from Being and Nothingness.

FOOTNOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. Words will be placed inside double quotations to indicate that they are part of Sartre's special terminology in the following manner:
 - (a) for the first time only in the case of frequently used terms such as "being-in-itself";
 - (b) on every occasion in the case of rarely used terms such as "fragility";
 - (c) on every occasion when the context does not make it clear that the term is being employed in a special rather than a general sense;
 - (d) in rare cases where a special emphasis is necessary or desirable to indicate metaphorical usage.
2. Iris Murdoch, Sartre - Romantic Rationalist, pp.54-59.
3. The terms "for-itself" and "in-itself" will be used interchangeably with their longer forms, "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself".
4. The "intentional act" is the mechanism through which the for-itself presumably transcends itself to the in-itself which it was.
5. Dagobert D. Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy, p.304.

CHAPTER I - PART I

NEGATION

In Being and Nothingness, Sartre sets up a unique model for human consciousness based on the notion of a "potent negativity"¹. He incorporates this into his ontology as the active, subject half of a dynamic dualism. The potent but empty consciousness acts upon and receives content from the powerless plenum of the outer world. This world outside consciousness Sartre characterizes as being-in-itself. Sartre derives his dualism through his opposition of being-for-itself (human consciousness or nothingness) to being-in-itself.

Sartre's dualism of being and nothingness is not original. This dualism has emerged off and on throughout the history of philosophy. What is original to Sartre is the radical nature of his notion of negation and of that which follows from it, his notion of freedom.

While Sartre carried the function of negation to an extreme, the use of negation as a tool of consciousness had not been totally overlooked by his predecessors. Descartes' concept of methodical doubt is based upon the singular capacity of consciousness to deny, which he takes as the mark of human freedom. Husserl's phenomenological epoche also assumes the negating ability of mind. Finally, from Spinoza, Sartre inherited the notion that "All Determination is Negation" and, like Hegel, he reversed this.

It remained for Sartre to qualify these notions of freedom and negation in such a manner that they would be much stronger. He takes advantage of a certain ambiguity in Descartes' concept of freedom to make what is essentially a weak and negative notion (based on man's ability to deny, i.e. to recognize error but not to affirm) into a positive and creative freedom. As for the concept of negation, Sartre criticized Hegel for his timid use of it in his theory of consciousness. In Sartre's definition of being-for-itself negation is the central notion. Sartre says of Hegel's use of negation that

It is not sufficient to posit mind as mediation and the negative; it is necessary to demonstrate negativity as the structure of being of mind.²

Sartre never notices the limitations of a freedom based on denial

or a consciousness based on negation. He simply sets out to prove that this freedom and this consciousness do in fact exist as he has defined them. He starts by examining the notions of negation and nothingness, asking what they are, where they come from, and when he first became aware of them. To establish his own special interpretation of negation, Sartre also introduces two neologisms into this section which Hazel Barnes says are without foundation in the French or English language.³

The first of these is "nihilation" ('néantir' is the French, a term Sartre probably coined by changing the noun 'néant', meaning nothingness or annihilation, into a verb form). However, this cannot be simply translated as 'to annihilate', which implies destruction, because Sartre wants to talk about the use of nothingness in a creative sense, on the basis of his principle that "all negation is determination". He suggests that nothingness functions to define being by surrounding being in particularity and thereby separating it from itself.

Sartre's second neologism, "néгатités"⁴, refers to a rather ambiguous category of "nothingness-contaminated" beings. Sartre says of them

There is an infinite number of realities which . . . in their inner structure are inhibited by negation, as by a necessary condition of their existence. We shall call them néгатités.⁵

Sartre is referring here to types of synthesis of negative and positive in which negation is the condition of positivity, for **example**, the immortality of the soul.

After completing his examination of these categories and providing a few examples to show that "néгатités" do in fact exist (the proof is far from conclusive as we hope to show later) Sartre asks what is the source of this remarkable negation that makes nihilation and néгатités possible.

He analyzes all the qualities which would be necessary to produce this negation and on the basis of this he sets up the hypothetical category of being-for-itself. Then Sartre realizes that the for-

itself, in order to have all the qualities necessary to account for negation, can be none other than human consciousness. Therefore, consciousness is the source of negation. This is predicated upon his assumption (following Descartes) that consciousness is unique in its ability to deny. All negation is a denial. Consciousness is the only source of denial. Therefore, consciousness must be the source of negation. Sartre says

In order for negation to exist in the world and in order that we may consequently raise questions concerning Being, it is necessary that in some way Nothingness be given.⁶

What is the source of this Nothingness? It cannot be a part of being-in-itself because that has been defined as full positivity. Sartre says that it must come from somewhere since as non-being it could not derive the necessary force to "nihilate" itself, that is, to create itself as a Nothingness. He suggests that

The being which by Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness. By this we must understand not a nihilating act, which would require in turn a foundation in Being, but an ontological characteristic of the Being required.⁷

In search of an answer, Sartre turns to an examination of "the question" which he refers to rather strangely as an "interrogative judgement". Every question posits the possibility of a negative reply, he observes. The being which is veiled to us and which we question may unveil itself to us as a nothingness. From this it follows that man, the questioner, must have been able to remove himself from the causal series because the causal series can produce only being. Therefore, man must be the source of nothingness. Sartre asks

What must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come to being.⁸

Man questions by means of a "double nihilation", Sartre tells us. Man nihilates the thing questioned by "suspending" it between being and non-being outside the causal order, and he also nihilates himself in relation to the thing questioned by "wrenching himself from being" in order to make non-being possible for himself.⁹

Sartre makes it clear that this nihilation is not actually a

destructive process. He says

Man's relation with being is that he can modify it.¹⁰

Man puts a particular existent out of circuit by putting himself out of circuit in relation to that existent. He puts himself out of reach of it by "retiring beyond a nothingness".

It is at this point that he introduces the notion of freedom into his thesis. Sartre now asks

What must man be in his being that through him nothingness may come to being?¹¹

Descartes following the Stoics has given a name to this possibility which human reality has to secrete a nothingness which isolates it -- it is freedom.¹²

This is, of course, a reference to Descartes' use of "methodical doubt" which Sartre has taken as the model for the nihilating activity of the for-itself.

Sartre asks "What is human freedom if through it nothingness comes into the world"? Realizing that he can get no further by the direct approach, Sartre attacks freedom from the point of view of anguish.

"Anguish" he defines as the recognition of our complete freedom of choice. It is frightening because this freedom takes away the guarantee on the validity of our values.¹³ In feeling anguish we feel the burden of our absolute responsibility.

One of the examples Sartre gives as proof of the existence of this anguish is "vertigo". This term actually means giddiness but Sartre uses it to refer to his own version of acrophobia, fear of high places. He suggests that this fear is not so much a fear of falling as a sudden awareness of our complete freedom to jump, to destroy ourselves.

Sartre says we know anguish only in extreme situations, like the above, where the usual defences we have built up to avoid facing the responsibility of our freedom break down.

His conclusion is that anguish does exist, as he has illustrated, and if it is the awareness of our freedom, then our freedom must also

exist. However, to say that freedom exists because anguish exists and anguish exists because freedom exists is surely circular. We will examine this issue later.

Sartre uses the presence of anguish to human consciousness as a sign of "value" as well as "freedom". He says

There is ethical anguish when I consider myself in my original relation to values. Values in actuality are demands which lay claim to a foundation.¹⁴

Sartre says that this foundation which value demands cannot be being for that would be inconsistent with the nature of value as ideal. A value is a goal conceived as attainable rather than a reality. Sartre maintains that only an "active freedom" could recognize values in this way. He says

It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values.¹⁵

In the process of his analysis of negation, Sartre deals peripherally with several other issues. He frequently tries to demonstrate the unviability of the psychological determinism model which is in direct contradiction with his own theory of consciousness as empty. To this end, he closely examines the concepts of motive and essence. This latter notion Sartre at first denies as being incompatible with his notion of a free for-itself. However, he later concedes that our self or ego

. . . with its a priori and historical content is the essence of man.¹⁶

Sartre considers the ego, with its material gathered from the past, to be a part of being-in-itself like the human body and therefore substantial. We will examine Sartre's treatment of "motive" in Part II. In order to support his case for absolute freedom Sartre must demonstrate that motive does not determine action.

A reader coming to the end of Sartre's analysis of negation can only wonder what questions if any were really answered. It is true that Sartre has limited his project to that of presenting the structures of being in the world claiming that to ask the metaphysical question of

why being is the way it is is beyond the province of philosophy.

In having presented a consistent and plausible explanation for the structures of the observable world, Sartre feels that he has succeeded in his project of constructing a viable ontology. The history of philosophy is full of plausible systems, however, and one cannot help wondering why Sartre should consider his system to be any closer to "the truth" than any other system. The fact that it has internal consistency is hardly enough to validate it if, indeed, it does have this consistency. He has tried to give added credence to his theory of an empty consciousness by undermining the opposing theory of the psychological determinists. However, his arguments against determinism are circular because they depend for their punch on an acceptance of his notion of the "non-substantial for-itself", not a notion that one is willing to accept very easily.

This section has been an attempt to survey the ground that Sartre covers in his analysis of negation. Its purpose is to serve as a guide for the detailed examination of his theory of negation which we will undertake in the next section. Given the trackless jungles of Sartre's thought in which so many commentators have lost their way, it could perhaps be more accurately described as a lifeline. For this reason, we think that the repetition it necessitates is justified.

CHAPTER I - PART II

NEGATION

"What is negation"? Sartre asks. The round-about way in which he attempts to evolve an answer is characteristic of his style. He begins by asking when do we first become aware of negation. His answer is that we first know negation when we first ask a question. If we question a thing it follows that there already exists in our minds the possibility of a negative answer. Thus, the concept of negation or non-being (Sartre seems to use these terms interchangeably here) exists in our minds prior to our question.

Two things about this answer bother us. Sartre has satisfactorily explained how awareness of negation necessarily accompanies the asking of a question in what is essentially an appeal to common sense. However, it does not follow from this that questioning is either the only way or the first way to become aware of negation. Furthermore, Sartre concedes that the concept of non-being exists in our minds prior to the question. Given Sartre's model of a transparent for-itself how could such a concept exist without us being aware of it? This is the very point he labors in his denial of the Freudian subconscious.

Having presumably dispatched this problem, Sartre goes on to ask where negation comes from. In terms of his initial hypothesis it cannot come from being-in-itself which is necessarily beyond negation as it is beyond affirmation. Therefore, it cannot furnish negative replies. In order to be able to affirm or negate, being-in-itself would have to have the capacity to act. In order to act it would have to have the strength to change something. It would have to be "potent". But Sartre has defined being-in-itself as "impotent" and logically enough.

If a thing is completely full it cannot make internal movements because it is identity with itself. Now action affects not only the thing acted upon. It also affects the actor. Just as hitting a ball creates a muscle contraction so any external action is bound to effect a certain internal reaction. This would necessitate internal change in

the in-itself which in terms of Sartre's model is impossible.

What are we left with then? Negation is an ontological reality because we are aware of it. Therefore, it must belong to one of the two all-encompassing but mutually exclusive categories of being that Sartre has set out. He has shown that it cannot belong to being-in-itself. It follows that it must belong to being-for-itself.

Sartre next tackles the problem of what negation is by asking how it is usually defined. He states that the standard thinking on negation is that it comes into existence through a comparison of what is with what could be. If this is the case then negation could only appear as the result of an act of judgment. Only human consciousness is capable of acts of judgment. Therefore it must be the source of negation. Negation must be a quality of judgment. But Sartre says

. . . it is not true that negation is only a quality of judgement.¹⁷

He explains that non-being does **not** come to things by a negative judgment. Rather it is the negative judgment which is conditioned and supported by non-being.

Sartre uses as an example of this his search for a friend, Pierre, whom he has arranged to meet in a restaurant. "Pierre is not there". Because he has expected to see Pierre, the café appears as empty to him (empty of the object of his "intention"). The café acts as "ground", in the "gestalt" sense, for the missing figure of Pierre.

This figure . . . is precisely a perpetual disappearance, it is Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the perpetual nihilation of the café.¹⁸

Sartre says that this nothingness serves as foundation for the judgment, "Pierre is not there". He has completely reversed the common theory that negation is a quality of judgment¹⁹ and he has actually made judgment dependent upon negation. He says, judgment is based on

. . . a certain pre-judicative comprehension of non-being.²⁰

The standard and Sartrian views of negation can be reconciled if we understand that Sartre is seeking both the epistemological and the ontological source of negation. From an epistemological point of view,

Sartre would agree with the assumption that negation is ideal.

Negation, the result of concrete psychic operations . . .
is incapable of existing by itself²¹

He means by this that negation can only be Known through an act of consciousness and is therefore, in an epistemological sense, only a quality of judgment. Since Sartre regards all acts of consciousness as being intentional in that special sense in which he uses this term²² it would follow that the negation could not be recognized apart from its object any more than its subject. Sartre says with reference to the Knowing of negation that

It is like an unreal encompassed by two full realities
neither of which claims it²³

In an ontological sense, however, Sartre does not consider negation to be unreal, existing only in terms of the relationship of consciousness to being-in-itself. As we mentioned earlier, Sartre thinks that the "being of negation"²⁴ refers us back to nothingness.

In order for man to intentionally act on being-in-itself, in order for him to question it or destroy it or perform any of the other "judgements" as Sartre calls them, being-in-itself must have a certain "fragility". It must be open to "question" or "destruction" in Sartre's sense. These are what we earlier referred to as négatités.

In order to have this openness, being-in-itself must exist in particularity. This separation of being from itself is made possible through the "nothingness-secreting" ability of the for-itself to which we previously referred. The "fragility" of the in-itself, its possibility of being negated, is only recognized by being-for-itself.

Sartre says that negation is the structure of the judicative proposition while nothingness is the structure of the real.²⁶ This is to say that the negation of the in-itself is the ideal product of the intentional act and therefore occurs only at an epistemological level. But the negation of the for-itself is real because it is grounded in its ontological nature as nothingness.

Nothingness exists as the nature of man's consciousness and therefore as a part of the real world considered as the totality of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. By contrast, negation exists only as a

product of the nihilating act of man's consciousness. This nihilating act is an intentional act, in Sartre's sense. Therefore the négativité it introduces into being, the negative judgment, only lasts as long as the intention which produces it. Thus, man's ability to separate being from itself and to thereby produce being in particularity is always only temporary. When his intention ceases, being-in-itself becomes a totality again. Therefore, negation is unreal. There is something very circular about Sartre's explanation of the particularity of the in-itself and we shall discuss this later in the chapter.

Negation has referred us back to nothingness. But nothingness in turn refers us back to being. Sartre has equated nothingness with consciousness which by the principle of intentionality must have an object, part of being-in-itself. Being is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it. That is why Sartre cannot accept Hegel's position that being and non-being are two components of the real, neither of which could exist in isolation. Sartre claims that this is not possible using the following argument. Hegel's notion presupposes that the two elements are "logically contemporary" since they are given equal status under the category of the real. But non-being is the contradiction of being. Sartre says this implies that

. . . logically, nothingness is subsequent to being since it is being, first posited, then denied.²⁷

It should be noted here that the strength of Sartre's argument depends upon the acceptability of his assumption that non-being is the contradiction of being as opposed to Hegel's assumption that non-being is the complement of being. Sartre provides no justification for his assumption other than his conclusion -- and since this depends upon his assumption in the first place, he is reasoning in a circle.

Furthermore, Sartre is arguing from premises about logical categories, the Hegelian concepts of being and non-being, to a conclusion about the ontological or the real. In Hegel, both being and nothing are empty categories and that is why they do not contradict each other or create a dualism.

Because being is thus utterly empty it is therefore equivalent to nothing.²⁸

In Heidegger as in Sartre, however, being and nothingness do not have this common bond. In their ontologies, these categories are so completely separated that a relationship between the two can only be effected through a transcendence (a going beyond, a surpassing) of one towards the other.

In Heidegger's dualism, being is the powerful element and it transcends itself towards the nothingness in which it is grounded. In Sartre's dualism, the opposite is the case. Nothingness, in the mode of consciousness, is the powerful element and it transcends itself towards the being, i.e. being-in-itself, in which it is grounded.

One might think in Sartre's case, because his basic distinction is between being-for-itself and being-in-itself that he is talking about two kinds of being, and in fact he does refer to the "being of nothingness". But the whole point of the description of being-for-itself is to suggest its constant struggle to transcend itself towards being, the being-in-itself which it was. Being-for-itself without the object of its intention, is nothing.

Our understanding of this point is not aided by some of Sartre's metaphors. His reference to being-for-itself as a "degraded in-itself", for example, implies a lingering substance. This implication undermines the very distinction between being and nothingness as substance and non-substance which Sartre is trying to make.

Sartre attacks Heidegger's ontology on the grounds that it cannot satisfactorily account for the existence of negation in the world. By making nothingness the ground of being, Sartre says that Heidegger is only able to account for absolute negation which occurs outside being. He cannot account for immanent and relative negation, Sartre's "Pierre is not there" for instance. According to Sartre there is negation in the inner structure of realities and these négatités as he calls them, supported as they are by being, must be explained within the limits of being.

Actually, Sartre in taking the reverse of Heidegger's position is involving himself in a similar sort of difficulty. If Heidegger's theory of consciousness surrounding being cannot account for relative

negation, then by the same argument, Sartre's theory of being surrounding nothingness cannot account for particular being. This would require the immanent prescence of nothingness in being-in-itself and that is not compatible with Sartre's definition of being-in-itself as a plenum.

Being-in-itself has no within which is opposed to a without. . . it does not enter into any connection with what is not itself This means that by itself it cannot even be what it is not, we have seen indeed that it can encompass not negation. . . . Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is.²⁹

Sartre explains the particularity of being-in-itself by reference to the nihilating activity of being-for-itself. It effects a separation in being by the "secretion of a nothingness". This causes a double nihilation in that it separates the for-itself from the in-itself and also separates being-in-itself from itself so it exists in particularity, that is as individual beings.

As we mentioned earlier, there seems to be circularity in this argument. Being can only be separated from itself by the for-itself yet the for-itself "recognizes" particular being. How could it recognize particular being if this separation did not already exist? And even if Sartre could account for this prior separation of being in his ontology, how could he explain the ability of the for-itself to recognize particular being? Nothingness, being non-substantial, can have no attributes. How then could it have the ability to direct itself towards a particular being?

Its nihilating act would have to be entirely random. If, when Sartre talks of consciousness "intending" an object, he would mean simply that it directs itself towards that object that would be inexplicable enough for the two reasons just given. But Sartre means much more than that by "intention".

By "intention", Sartre refers to the actual "constitution"³⁰ of an object. He does not mean this in the ontological sense in which he imagines Husserl to mean it and which is the basis for his conclusion that Husserl is an idealist. He means it rather in the epistemological sense of constituting meanings. This might defend him against our contention that he has made the separation of being-in-itself ontologically

prior to the nihilating act but in doing so it exposes him to a far more serious attack.

For conscioueness to "constitute" a particular object, it must have a prior mental conception of it. Without this, constitution would be an entirely random process. There is, in fact, order and consistency in our experience and Sartre must in some way account for this. However, he cannot explain constitution as the result of a prior mental state, because that would commit him to a theory of innate ideas which is incompatible with his notion of an empty consciousness.

Sartre has tried to evade this problem by referring to the "spontaneity" of consciousness and talking poetically about the natural affinity of the for-itself for the in-itself. But it seems to us that he is very firmly caught on the horns of a dilemma. In order to escape Idealism he must treat constitution as an epistemological activity but in doing so he contradicts his notion of an empty consciousness. And if he uses his "natural affinity" argument of a prior attraction of the for-itself to the in-itself to avoid giving content to consciousness, then, constituting activity of the for-itself immediately becomes an ontological activity and he is back in the Idealist camp. It seems to us that Heidegger's difficulty in accounting for relative negation is mild in comparison to Sartre's conundrum. He has literally replaced God with man in the role of creator ex nihilo.

Because Sartre sees the for-itself as able to transcend itself in relation to the in-itself in any mode it chooses, Sartre takes this to be the mark of human freedom.

Let us now examine the notions of "freedom" and "value" he bases on this transcending ability.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. Sartre defines human consciousness as "Being-for-itself", a seemingly contradictory combination of power without a substance, of action without an agent.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.19.
3. Ibid., pp.17 and 21. Cf. footnotes on "nihilation" and négativités on these pages.
4. Ibid., p.21.
5. Ibid., p.21. Sartre's word for types of human activities which contain negativity as an integral part of their structure such as absence, change, interrogation and destruction.
6. Ibid., p.22. Sartre obviously conceives of "nothingness" here in a quasi-substantial sense.
7. Ibid., p.23.
8. Ibid., p.24.
9. Ibid., p.23. This reference to self is of course a reference to man's body and reified ego which belong to the category of being-in-itself.
10. Ibid., p.24.
11. Ibid., p.24.
12. Ibid., p.24.
13. Ibid., Cf. glossary, p.547.
14. Ibid., p.38.
15. Ibid., p.38.
16. Ibid., p.35.
17. Ibid., p.7.
18. Ibid., p.10. This is an example of Sartre's use of "double nihilation" which was explained in the Introduction.
19. "Judgment" is defined by Rune's dictionary of Philosophy as a belief or proposition; the mental act of asserting affirmation or denial of a relation. Sartre uses it in the sense of a relation of consciousness to being, in much the way Descartes did.

20. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.7.
21. Ibid., p.6.
22. Sartre's interpretation of "intentionality" differs significantly from Husserl's "constitution of essences" as a function of the intentional act since he considers this to be a form of Idealism.
23. Ibid., p.6.
24. An example of Sartre's frequent substantialization of nothingness and negation.
25. Ibid., p.xlix.
26. Ibid., p.7.
27. Ibid., p.14.
28. W.T. Stace, The Philosophy of Hegel, p.135. Cf. Sections 177-178.
29. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.lxvi. As this quotation indicates Sartre's quasi-Parmenidean concept of being-in-itself is a bizarre and self-contradictory notion.
30. Ibid., pp.331, 414, 27, 41. Sartre means "constitution" in the special phenomenological sense of mental construction.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM AND VALUE

Sartre's remarks on freedom and value are scattered, vague and sometimes even contradictory. He uses neither term in the usual dictionary sense. His "freedom" is a negative notion meaning the ability to choose between possibilities by denying those which are unacceptable. In adopting this peculiar definition of freedom he is following Descartes.¹

Sartre's concept of value is also unusual. Although it is a term most commonly defined as "worth, desirability or utility",² in the Sartrian context value means simply choice or preference.³ While choice is certainly a part of the "valuing" process, "valuing" also involves a standard against which to measure the appropriateness of these choices. If Sartre's system cannot allow for this standard then he is open to the charge of voluntarism made against him by F.A. Olafson.⁴

We want to argue that ethical discourse in terms of choice rather than "value", in the full and proper meaning of the term, is an evasion of a standard still implied, rather than an avoidance of it. Secondly, we want to demonstrate that the Sartrian ontology would not be compatible with any recognized ethical theory.

Most ethical theory is based on standards, be these standards external as in the case of objectivist ethics, or internal, as in the case of subjectivist ethics. Because recent ethical theorists have tended to concern themselves primarily with analysis of the language of morals, essentially a meta-ethical rather than an ethical problem, the importance of standards in ethical theory has been overlooked.

Standards are more readily associated with objectivist ethics than with subjectivist ethics because, in the case of the former, they are external. Objectivist ethics consider that moral judgments, like scientific judgments, are reducible to statements of fact. This clearly implies the existence of a standard in the external world which would function to measure right against wrong. It follows that, in terms of this theory, ethical truths are never relative.

. . . there are certain actions which are right or certain objects which are good for all individuals alike.⁵

Subjectivist ethicists also consider moral judgments to be reducible to statements of fact but in their case, these facts are entirely relative. They see them to be nothing more than affective states of consciousness based on the psychology of the individual. As such, these states of consciousness, or feelings, are based on personal preferences, that is, on individual tastes and inclinations, rather than being based on facts of "right" and "wrong" in any general sense (universal or societal), as the objectivist suggests.

Because they are individualist, and therefore relative, the problem of standards is not usually referred to in relation to subjectivist ethics. It is our contention, however, that these ethics do depend upon a standard, although this standard may not be external, except in an indirect sense. Since subjectivist ethics are based on a choice between feelings, i.e. psychological states, they involve preference and we would hold that preference entails a standard.

The term 'preference' means the liking of one thing better than another. A comparison is clearly implied here. Two conditions are necessary before a comparison can occur. Two or more objects for comparison must be present, and a standard must exist through which one object can be measured against the other(s). The dictionary defines 'standard' as a

thing serving as a basis for comparison.⁶

Subjectivist ethics are predicated upon a comparison of states of feelings, in terms of likes and dislikes or happiness and unhappiness. Their standard then, must be some ideal of happiness or taste which the individual has evolved through the years. It is because of the influence of environment and circumstance on taste that we earlier made the seemingly contradictory reference to an "indirectly external standard".

We conclude that a subjectivist ethical judgment is effected by a comparison of states of consciousness (or feelings) based on some internalized ideal of taste or happiness. Let us now attempt to place this definition within the context of the Sartrian ontology.

Given Sartre's theory of an empty consciousness, it is immediately evident that it would not be compatible with "states of consciousness" and "internalized ideals". Sartre states that

There are, as a matter of fact, no affective states. . . . Reflection yields us affective consciousnesses. Joy, sorrow, melancholy are consciousnesses. And we must apply to them the great law of consciousness; that all consciousness is consciousness of something. In a word, feelings have special intentionalities, they represent one way -- among others -- of self-transcendence. Hatred is hatred of someone, love is love of someone. . . . To hate Paul is to intention Paul as a transcendent object of a consciousness.⁷

In rendering Sartre's ontological position compatible with a subjectivist ethics we have two problems, then. Since his "consciousness" is empty, it cannot contain the "affective states" which feelings are usually defined as, nor can it contain a standard, "an internalized ideal". We see by the above quotation, however, that Sartre has accounted for the existence of feelings in his system by defining them as "intentional acts". But how can he account for preference? And for the standard it entails?

As we earlier demonstrated, preference is based on comparison, in this case, a comparison of feelings. If feelings are intentional acts, it would follow that this comparison could only be effected through the simultaneous existence of two or more intentional acts, since the intentional act only "exists" as the ideal correlate of consciousness and the object of its intention.

In terms of Sartre's ontology, this comparison would have to be made by the 'reflective cogito' which takes as the object of its intention the intentional act, itself. As we earlier mentioned, the object of intention only exists for consciousness for the duration of the intentional act. It therefore follows that the intention of the reflective cogito would have to occur simultaneously with the intentions of the pre-reflective cogito.

The simultaneous occurrence of the intentions of the pre-reflective and reflective cogitos is not only a possibility but a necessity in Sartre's ontology. Since intention only exists for the

duration of its act it would have to be Known at this time (by the reflective cogito). This follows from the very principle of intentionality that consciousness is consciousness of something. The only being of the non-substantial consciousness is its "Knowing", its "intending" of an external object or of itself as object. This explains why the reflective cogito can only "intend" simultaneously with the pre-reflective cogito -- but it is not so obvious how or why there can exist simultaneously two or more intentions of feeling of the pre-reflective cogito.

Sartre has stated that each feeling requires a separate object for its intention. Thus for two feelings to occur at the same time consciousness must be simultaneously intending emotions in two different directions. Unlikely as this seems we cannot prove that it is impossible in relation to things in the world. Perhaps one can covet one object and loathe another simultaneously. But things are not very important in a theory of ethics, for the primary focus of ethics is inter-personal relationships. And Sartre's theory of "Being-for-others", an integral part of his ontology, is not compatible with the concept of a simultaneous occurrence of emotions, and therefore is not compatible with a subjectivist ethic.

In propounding his theory of "Being-for-others", Sartre talks in terms of a circle of relations with the Other. Sartre says that

. . . all the patterns of conduct toward the Other-as-object include within themselves an implicit and veiled reference to an Other-as-subject, and this reference is their death. Upon the death of a particular conduct toward the Other-as-object arises a new attitude which aims at getting hold of the Other-as-subject, and this in turn reveals its instability and collapses to give way to the opposite conduct. Thus we are indefinitely referred from the Other-as-object to the Other-as-subject and vice versa. The movement is never arrested, and this movement with its abrupt reversals of direction constitutes our relation with the Other.⁸

Sartre explains⁹ that all men's complex patterns of conduct toward one another are only enrichments of the three basic attitudes of love, hate and desire. Since each of these patterns of conduct, these emotional intentions, involves a "circle of relations" with the Other, in

which the author of the intentional act himself becomes the object of intention for the other, it seems most unlikely that he could be engaged in more than one such intention at a time and even less likely that he would be able to focus his reflective cogito on a comparison of his intentional acts while flowing back and forth as object-subject for the Other. And without this possibility of multiple intentionalities Sartre does not have the basis for the comparison of emotions that a subjectivist ethic necessitates.

I think, therefore, on the basis of this argument, that we can rule out the possibility of evolving a subjectivist ethic, at least in the ordinary sense of the term, from Sartre's ontology. And, in his little article, 'Existentialism is a Humanism,' Sartre, himself, says as much.

. . . feeling is formed by the deeds that one does;
therefore, I cannot consult it as a guide to action.¹⁰

With the publication of Language, Truth and Logic in 1936 by the logical positivist, A.J. Ayer, a radically modified form of Subjectivism came into being. Ayer maintains that moral language functions to express feelings and therefore moral statements cannot be considered as either true or false. This separates him from the non-naturalist position of the objectivists such as G.E. Moore.

Ayer et al. can be distinguished from both the objectivist and "naive subjectivist"¹¹ positions however, on the basis of their non-cognitivist approach to ethical theory. In taking this stand against reason in ethics, the Emotive-Imperativists, as Ayer's school is most generally known, stand alone in the history of ethics. Not only are they in opposition to their predecessors, the objectivists and "naive subjectivists", but also to their successors, people like Stephen Toulmin, J.O. Urmson, P.H. Nowell-Smith and Kurt Baier, who have all tried to bring back some element of reason to ethical theory. Even within the school itself, there are differences on this point, the emotivists, led by Ayer, taking a much firmer stand against reason in ethics than imperativists, led by C.L. Stevenson.

Basic to the emotive-imperativist position is the claim that all

philosophical problems about ethics are really problems of language. Ayer claims that moral statements cannot be considered as assertions of any kind at all because they are not reducible to statements of fact. Stevenson does not agree with him on this point, however, observing that because a statement is non-verifiable it does not necessarily follow that it is nonsensical. Stevenson holds that moral words have both a descriptive and an emotive meaning and he therefore cannot be considered a non-cognitivist in the same radical sense as Ayer.

There are several similarities between the Sartrian and non-cognitivist positions. For example, Ayer considers "truth" to be merely a sign of assertion which belongs to the logical rather than to the real world. This is a large part of what Sartre means when he says that the real world is absurd or meaningless. In accordance with this, Sartre would agree with Ayer that moral statements are primarily expressions of feelings. However, with the introduction of the imperative element into moral statements as a secondary function for Ayer and as a primary function for Stevenson, Sartre would be in total disagreement.

One of the major themes of Being and Nothingness is Sartre's argument against psychological determinism. And the basis of this argument is his denial of causal influence. Sartre, therefore, would not accept the notion that people are influenced by commands. His position on this is made especially clear in his description of the gambler which we shall review later. The apparent influence which commands assert on people would be for Sartre an example of "motive". And Sartre has described human freedom as that which creates a gap between motive and act thus breaking the causal chain and placing man outside determinism. The notion of influence by command is obviously not compatible with the Sartrian concept of freedom and therefore not compatible with any ethic based on this freedom.

The ethical theory of C.L. Stevenson differs from Ayer's theory in that it maintains that moral statements have two purposes, the descriptive and the emotive. Stevenson refers to the emotive element as the imperative element. He considers the latter to be the primary

function of ethical statements. Therefore, the same grounds that separate the ethics of Sartre and Ayer would separate the ethics of Sartre and Stevenson.

The "good reasons" ethicists emerged in reaction to the radical non-cognitivism of Ayer and Stevenson. R.M. Hare, who some philosophers, perhaps wrongly, have associated with this school, seems really to fall into a category of his own. He accepted Stevenson's distinction between the descriptive and imperative elements in ethical statements but labelled the latter the prescriptive element. It is the universalizability he gives to this element that makes Hare's ethic unique. He maintains that a genuine moral imperative (prescription) is one which is accepted by the speaker as applying to him as well as to everybody else.

Could this universal prescriptive element fit into a Sartrian ethic? Hare seems to think so. In his book, Freedom and Reason, he says

Sartre himself is as much a universalist as I am. . . .¹²

Sartre does in fact make ethical statements which would support this claim.

I bear the responsibility of the choice which, in committing myself, also commits the whole of humanity.¹³

However, we have quite frequently observed a logical gap between Sartre's ontological and ethical statements. Remarks like the above are not consistent with his radical notion of freedom and therefore could not be logically derived from his ontology.

Sartre's concept of freedom is Cartesian. It is personal and existential. That is to say, it must be experienced to be known. The limitation of this libertarian view, which he shares with Descartes and Kant is that it gives no basis for proving the existence of the freedom of the other. Descartes was able to solve this problem by introducing a God into his system which served as a logical step between himself and the other. An atheist like Sartre, however, does not have this possibility open to him.

If the freedom of the other cannot be proved in terms of the Sartrian ontology, then it is our contention that universalizability

cannot be part of a Sartrean ethic. One might well ask why it should be necessary to be able to prove the freedom of the other in order to logically adhere to a theory of universalizability? In reference to universalizable moral prescriptions, Hare himself says that

It is indeed true of imperative sentences that if anyone, in using them, is being sincere or honest, he intends that the person referred to should do something (namely, what is commanded).¹⁴

One can only logically use the terms "ought" or "should" in reference to other people if one has some grounds for assuming that they are morally free.

If universalizability cannot be logically derived from the Sartrean ontology, it seems fair to conclude that the Sartrean and Harean ethics could not be compatible. In a Harean theory without universalizability moral choice would be capricious because it is the only factor which acts to control this choice in his ethic. It is difficult to see how an ethic in which moral choice is capricious could be considered as an ethic at all. Thus we can conclude that a Harean ethic in any meaningful sense would not fit into the Sartrean ontology.

Since some attention has been paid to the rather striking similarities between the Sartrean and Harean positions, we might well ask ourselves if universalizability is even compatible with Hare's own theory of prescriptivism. Since Hare's stand on moral freedom is so firm, perhaps he, too, is a libertarian. He says

. . . the fact of moral freedom is what gives moral language one of its characteristic logical properties;¹⁵

And he does argue against what he calls "naive determinism".¹⁶ However, he counteracts this by saying that

. . . in a certain class of cases . . . predictability rules out moral judgment. . . .¹⁷

and we must conclude that he is a determinist in a sufficiently significant sense to render his position incompatible with Sartrean libertarianism. As a determinist, Hare does not share Sartre's difficulty in logically demonstrating the freedom of the other. The other's freedom can be established negatively by simply demonstrating that no coercion is involved in his acts.

We conclude that universalizability is a valid part of Hare's ethical theory but that, because of the radical nature of Sartre's concept of freedom, it could not be reconciled with a Sartrian ontology. Since it is only in the presence of this element that Hare's ethic is meaningful, we further conclude that Sartrian and Harian ethics could not be compatible.

Although other "good reasons" ethicists bear certain similarities to Sartre, we do not think that any of them have provided an ethic which Sartre could accept or which would be compatible with his ontology.

Nowell-Smith, like Sartre, has a distinct voluntarist tendency. He, too, would maintain that the primary use of "good" is to express one's preference. Unlike Sartre, however, he takes the implication of preference to its logical conclusion and endorses the necessity of a standard.¹⁸ This standard is also implied by his definition of value terms as "gerundive". They tell us that something is worthy to be praised, blamed, etc. As we have previously demonstrated, this notion of a standard is completely incompatible with the Sartrian ontology.

Stephen Toulmin accepts the Nowell-Smithian notion of "gerundives" and takes it even further. He maintains that the central problem of ethics is a logical one, that is, to determine what are good reasons for ethical decisions. In taking this stand, Toulmin departs from the voluntarism of Sartre and Nowell-Smith and places himself even further from the Sartrian position than his predecessors.

Kurt Baier tried to carry Toulmin's position even further on the assumption that one can find reasons for one's actions in a consideration of the nature of society. This is such an obvious version of the "serious" morality Sartre decries¹⁹ that it needs no further comment.

We have now examined all the major positions in modern ethics arising directly or indirectly from the basic subjectivist position. However, we have been unable to find a single one that could be reconciled with Sartre's radical concept of freedom and which therefore could be molded into a Sartrian ethic.

Sartre's concern with value and with setting up human consciousness as an absolute standard for behavior make the establishment of an

objectivist ethic on the basis of his ontology appear to be a natural and possible project for him.

Before there can be truth, any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of every-body; it consists in one's immediate sense of one's self.²⁰

However, we shall attempt to demonstrate that an objectivist ethic is not possible in terms of Sartre's ontology.

Let us start by looking at the positions of freedom and value in Sartre's ontology. In defining "freedom" as man's ability to deny, Sartre is integrating it into the nihilating act which has already been established as the mode of the for-itself. Since nihilation can be equated with intentionality Sartre is thus able to characterize man's consciousness as free while still not substantializing it.

Sartre also uses the "nihilating act" to account for value in his ontology. It is defined as

The nihilation of what is and the positing of what ideally could be.²¹

Sartre states that it is based upon man's ability to recognize a lack, that is, the nihilating or transcending ability of the for-itself.

Freedom is prior to value in Sartre's system. It is only through man's freedom, that is, the unique ability of the for-itself to nihilate the object of its intention, that "valuing", "the creative apprehension of a lack", is possible. As we earlier explained, the exercise of man's freedom involves a double nihilation. What makes man free is not his normal nihilating ability alone, that is his ability to separate being from itself, but the fact that he can "secrete a nothingness" between himself and being. Sartre says that man is free in his situation because he can distance himself from it. This places him outside the causal chain of being and therefore outside determinism. And thus he is free.

It is because of this ability to "transcend" his situation that man can recognize a lack and this, his ability to measure what is against the totality of what ideally could be, is what makes "value", in Sartre's sense, possible.

Perhaps we should examine exactly what Sartre means by "lack". He suggests that the existence of a lack implies a trinity:

1. the lacking (le manquant) -- that which is missing;
2. the existing (l'existant) -- that which misses what is lacking;
3. the lacked (le manqué) -- the totality broken by the lacking which will be restored by the synthesis of the two.

The dictionary defines "lack" as

"deficiency, want, need of . . . "22

and Sartre's analysis of lack can be extrapolated from this. If lack is a "need" then obviously it is a need of something. If it is a "deficiency" then, in combination with the thing of which it is deficient, it will be a totality.

The recognition of a lack means a recognition of the two broken parts of the whole on the basis of their projected reunion. Sartre says

This lack is appearance on the ground of totality.²³

The act of human consciousness in seeing something as being only a part of what it actually is is what Sartre calls the creative apprehension of a lack, as mentioned above. The object of this apprehension is a négativité.

We can now clear up a point raised in the first part of this paper²⁴ where it was suggested that Sartre's proof for the existence of négativités was inconclusive. That was really a kind way of saying it was non-existent.

Sartre could not afford to put forth a proof of négativités based on his explanation of them above because it would have led him directly into the Idealist position which he has tried very hard to avoid. On Page 21 of Being and Nothingness, Sartre suggests that négativités are inhabited by negation as a necessary condition of their existence. Since it is clearly contradictory to say that something must be nothing in order to be something, the only thing he could mean here is that they exist as that dimension which allows for a figure-ground apprehension of totality by human consciousness. That is to say, they exist as "the creative apprehension of a lack". This would of course make the exist-

ence of négatités solely dependent upon human consciousness as it is the only source of this creative ability. Thus négatités could only exist ideally.

We have still not really determined what value is. Sartre says

In all cases of lack, value is 'the lacked', it is not the lacking.²⁵

All forms of comparison and therefore all forms of preference or choice are founded upon the recognition of a lack. This is because the more-less distinction is implicit in the notion of comparison. Totally different things cannot be compared. To be comparable, one thing must be the same as another only more or less so and thus, in one or the other, a lack will be recognizable.

On what basis then could the "nihilating for-itself" recognize a lack? It can only "intend" itself towards the world and, as we previously observed, there would seem to be no basis for comparison between the empty for-itself and the full in-itself.

It is possible the for-itself could simultaneously intend itself towards two or more aspects of the in-itself (we were unable to discount that possibility entirely) thus allowing for comparison and the recognition of a lack. However, comparison requires a standard, as we have discovered. The standard for the recognition of a lack is the recognition, the projection, of a totality. The for-itself, being nothing could have no basis for relating to such a totality, being-in-itself, and therefore could not recognize it.

Sartre states otherwise, however, saying the for-itself only exists in the form or mode of denying the in-itself which it was -- its totality. And this nihilation of being represents the original connection between the being of the for-itself and the in-itself. Therefore, the for-itself is the foundation of itself as a lack of being -- that is, it determines its being by means of a being which it is not.²⁶

The for-itself cannot sustain nihilation without determining itself as a lack of being.²⁷

The ability of the for-itself to determine itself as a lack of being seems more consistent with Sartre's category of "the existing"

than with his category of "the lacking" which he has equated with the for-itself. The transcendence which would be necessary for the for-itself to project itself towards the totality which it was can only be one of two things. It may be a recognition of itself as a lack in terms of itself, in which case it must have substance. This would be in keeping with Sartre's crescent moon analogy. It is only because part of the moon is there that there is a basis for projecting the full moon. The second possibility is that the for-itself as nothing truly transcends itself towards a being with which it can have no common bond. Even if we accept Sartre's poetic description of this transcendence as a denial of being, we still feel some basis for comparison would be necessary. Before a thing can be denied, it must be recognized.

On the basis of the above, we do not think that Sartre has provided an adequate basis for this assertion that the for-itself can recognize a lack. Since he has defined value as that which is constituted by the nihilating for-itself in its capacity to recognize a lack it would follow that he has not provided an adequate basis for "value", even in the reduced sense in which he thinks of it, in his system.

Let us now return to an examination of Sartre's notion of freedom. Sartre claims that because our choices are not made for us we are free -- free to deny those possibilities open to us. Choice is effected by default. When we do not deny, we automatically affirm.

Sartre begins his analysis of freedom by asking what makes me aware of my freedom. His answer is "anguish". This idea is not original to Sartre. Kierkegaard said that we experience anguish in the face of our freedom, while Heidegger, along a slightly different track, said that anguish is the apprehension of nothingness. Since Sartre has equated nothingness with the for-itself and identified it with freedom and since he has made anguish the recognition of freedom, his position on the relationship of freedom to anguish is quite compatible with the positions of his predecessors.

Sartre points up the unique nature of anguish by contrasting it

to ordinary fear. Fear is of things or others outside ourselves while anguish is of ourselves, our reactions, which we cannot be sure of ahead of time. More specifically,

. . . fear is the unreflective apprehension of the transcendent and anguish is the reflective apprehension of the self; the one is born in the destruction of the other.²⁸

Sartre chooses vertigo as being perhaps the clearest instance of the fear-anguish "dialectic". The case is that of a person standing at the edge of a cliff.²⁹ His fear of falling alternates with his anguish at the thought of jumping. While under the influence of fear, he experiences himself as a thing passive and destructible, before the possibility of falling. (For Sartre, as for Descartes, the body is a part of the objective reality of the world and as such it is not contradictory for it to be the object of intention of the pre-reflective cogito). The way to escape his fear is to act, by moving away from the edge. By acting, he substitutes his own possibilities for those transcendent possibilities before which he was passive. He is now in control of the situation and no longer afraid. However, his control makes him aware of his freedom. This awareness is overwhelming and immediately casts him into anguish. By resuming his subjectivity he has placed upon himself the responsibility of choosing whether he will back away from the edge of the cliff or jump over.

But the quintessential part of anguish is more than our awareness of absolute freedom of choice. It is the realization of our own nothingness,³⁰ that not only are we not what we will be but that we cannot even guess at this future being. We constitute ourselves through our choices. Our being is determined by our choice of actions, as opposed to the position of the determinists who say that our actions are determined by our being through motives which were originally generated in us by outside forces.

We do not feel that Sartre's illustration of "vertigo" is compatible with his negative notion of freedom. He says

If nothing compels me to save my life, nothing prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss. The decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet.³¹

This suggests to us a positive action -- an affirmation of death rather than a denial of life. An example of the latter would be the refusal to save oneself if one slipped on the mountain, which is hardly the same as deliberately throwing oneself off it. However, Sartre does not accept the common distinction between active and passive choice. He clearly says that one cannot escape choice merely by refusing to choose (not saving oneself when one falls) for that in itself is a choice.³²

This is a clear instance of the ambiguity inherent in Sartre's notion of freedom. While some commentators take this ambiguity to be a confusion we take it to be an ontological necessity stemming from Sartre's definition of freedom as the product of the nihilating activity of the for-itself. As we earlier demonstrated, the definition of the for-itself as an empty force is self-contradictory. And Sartre's "freedom" is grounded in this contradiction.

Both the "nihilating act" of the for-itself and the freedom which is its product imply something more than denial or a passive negativity. In "the creative apprehension of a lack" there is an active constituting element involved, as we earlier demonstrated. This is inherent in the very notion of act. Sartre tries to avoid the acknowledgement of this creative element by talking, as in the above example, as if one could assert a denial. This is surely a contradiction in terms, however.

We might ask why it is necessary for Sartre to reduce his concept of freedom to Descartes' "ability to doubt or deny" thereby involving himself in this contradiction in the first place. Just as Sartre introduces substance into the for-itself by talking of a "nihilating force" so he will substantialize freedom if he includes in it a creative decision-making element.³³

Perhaps this "decisive conduct" of freedom is an exception to the normal manifestation of Sartrian freedom as only a denial and would not be found apart from his example of "vertigo"? An examination of Sartre's other illustration of anguish assures us that this is not the case, however.

Sartre's other significant example of anguish is the ex-gambler

who knows "anguish in the face of the past" every time he confronts a gaming table. Sartre suggests that the conflict or "anguish" the gambler experiences in this situation is not the result of any approach-avoidance conflict generated by opposing motives as the determinists would have us believe but rather the result of his sudden awareness of absolute freedom. No motive arising out of a decision made yesterday not to gamble can ultimately determine the gambler's action. He is entirely free to gamble just as he is free not to gamble. He must choose, however, and he is anguished by the necessity of his choice.

Sartre uses this example to illustrate that our freedom which is made known to us through anguish is characterized by the nothingness which comes between motive and act. He holds that the fact that our motives cannot determine our actions in any direct causal manner is the condition of our freedom. This is in direct opposition to the determinist and common sense position to the effect that "motive" is

"... what induces a person to act".³⁴

Our concern here, however, is in ascertaining whether the choice of the gambler is a straight denial compatible with Sartre's notion of a negative freedom, or whether there is an active, creative element in it similar to the one we discovered in his example of vertigo. If the gambler chooses to gamble, is that to be regarded as an affirmation of the gaming table, or as a denial of his resolution not to gamble? Perhaps this situation can only be described as the absurd "assertion of a denial" we previously referred to.

There appears to be an interchangeability between "affirmation" and "denial" (negation) in this example. Since it does not seem to be an exceptional illustration of the act of choosing it seems likely that interchangeability of affirmation and denial would be a quality of all acts of choosing. In view of this possibility we should perhaps take a closer look at these notions of "doubt" and "denial" on which Sartre bases his concept of freedom.

The dictionary defines "to doubt" as in part the ability to
 "... call in question. . . ." ³⁵

And it defines "to deny" as in part to

"... declare untrue or non-existent. . . ." ³⁶

It is our contention that in both cases a positive transcending ability is implied. As we discussed at length in Part I of Chapter I, the questioning of a thing or the judging of it as untrue or non-existent implies the capacity to see beyond that thing to what it ideally could be. The recognition of a lack entails the recognition of the whole, precisely the terms in which Sartre has defined his nihilating power of the for-itself, and to question or to judge a thing is to recognize a lack in it.

In his section on Negation, Sartre describes "affirmation" and "denial" as modes of intentionality, ideal correlates of consciousness and the object of its intention. And in terms of the above definitions this becomes quite comprehensible. There is a suspension of the world which man effects through his "nothingness-secreting" ability and which must take place prior to any judgment. It is this suspension that makes man free for by placing himself beyond the "causal chain of being" he escapes determinism. Affirmation and denial are forms of the judgment he is then free to make and, as such, they are secondary to his freedom.

On the basis of this we are obliged to realize that one of the major issues we have been pursuing in this paper has turned out to be a red herring. Our assumption that Sartre's concept of freedom is negative (an assumption we share with numerous Sartrian commentators³⁷ who take this to follow from Sartre's endorsement of Descartes' definition of freedom as the ability to doubt or deny) appears now to be based on nothing more than a terminological subtlety. Since this assumption was the basis of our contention that Sartre's negative notion of freedom was not compatible with the creative element of the nihilating for-itself on which it is based, we must now revise our opinion.

We conclude that Sartre's distinction of freedom as negative is a purely semantic one which does not generate any conflict with its ontological basis in the for-itself. Furthermore, we can now see that a freedom based on denial can have that "decisive conduct"³⁷ that genuine choice seems to demand. This is certainly an important element in Sartre's conception of choice, which is what concerns us here. He

makes it quite clear that our freedom is not based on caprice and that choice in this sense would not be meaningful.³⁸

Do these new capacities which we have discovered in Sartre's concept of freedom make it possible to account for value as "the creative apprehension of a lack" in terms of his ontology? Value, since it entails choice, is dependent upon freedom. It would be pointless to establish a basis for choice if freedom of choice were not possible. As we have discovered, the creative element entailed by the transcending capacity of the for-itself can be accepted as a part of Sartre's notion of freedom. This makes value as "creative apprehension" a possibility. However, this does not account for the other element of value which we previously considered. It does not explain what standard the for-itself would use for apprehending a "lack" in a situation.

The recognition of this "lack" is explicable in the limited sense of a straight comparison on the basis of simultaneous multiple intentionalities of objects in the world, but, as we have already demonstrated, it could not account for attitudes or feelings, the basis of our relationship with the Other. As such, we still do not have the basis for a standard against which to measure moral issues which an objectivist ethic necessitates.

We must conclude that Sartre's theory of value, because of the limits on it necessitated by its position in his ontology, cannot support an ethic.

Although his theory of "freedom" appears to be a broader concept than we had first assumed, it is distorted by the fact that it is grounded in a contradiction -- the identification of the nihilating for-itself with empty consciousness. Since Sartre can only explain away what is for him the resulting absurdity of an attribute without substance by alluding to a prior atomic-like attraction of the for-itself to the in-itself "which it was", it follows that the for-itself takes its direction from something outside itself. If so, Sartre's radical theory of freedom would actually be a form of determinism. Individual choice would only appear to be grounded in the for-itself but would actually be influenced by a prior attraction to being-in-itself which

came into existence with the for-itself and could therefore not be subject to conscious control.

It would appear that Sartre's meta-ethical development of the notions of freedom and value do not provide a viable basis for an ethic. Furthermore, his elaboration of a theory of freedom on the basis of his notion of the nihilating for-itself makes an inherent contradiction in this category of being very evident. The result of a literal interpretation of Sartre's ontology seems to be a reductio ad absurdum.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.24.
2. H.W. Fowler (ed.), Concise Oxford Dictionary, 3rd Edition, p. 1361.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp.41, 426-427.
Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, p.291.
4. F.A. Olafson, Principles and Persons, pp.58-64.
5. Dagobert D. Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy, p.217.
6. H.W. Fowler (ed.), Concise Oxford Dictionary, p.1182.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, The Psychology of the Imagination, p.88.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.408.
9. Ibid., p.407.
10. Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, p.297.
11. P.W. Taylor (ed.), The Moral Judgment, "The Case Against Naive Subjectivism", Paul Edwards, p.95.
12. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, p.38.
13. Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, p.293.
14. R.M. Hare, The Language of Morals, p.13.
15. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, p.61.
16. Ibid., p.63.
17. Ibid., p.61.
18. P.H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics, Penguin Books, London 1954, p.314.
19. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.552.
20. Walter Kaufmann, "Existentialism is a Humanism", Existentialism, p.302.
21. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.70.
22. H.W. Fowler (ed.), Concise Oxford Dictionary, 3rd Edition, p.632.
23. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.64.

24. Cf. thesis, p.9.
25. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.69.
26. Ibid., pp.69-72.
27. Ibid., p.69.
28. Ibid., p.30.
29. Ibid., p.34.
30. Ibid., p.34.
31. Ibid., p.32.
32. Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, p.305.
33. Ibid., p.32.
34. H.W. Fowler, (ed.), Concise Oxford Dictionary, 3rd Edition,
p.740.
35. Ibid., p.343.
36. Ibid., p.305.
37. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.32.
38. Walter Kaufmann (ed.), Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a
Humanism", p.305.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to determine whether Jean-Paul Sartre, in his major early work, Being and Nothingness, has succeeded in setting forth a viable ontology and, if so, whether an ethic can be derived from it.

On the basis of his dualism of being and nothingness (consciousness) Sartre has attempted to provide a consistent explanation of the world free of the more obvious difficulties of interactionism.

He has done this by making the two elements of his system complementary and inter-dependent. Being is full and complete in itself. It therefore has no power for change or expression. It depends on consciousness for action and interpretation.

Consciousness is empty and contingent upon being. Sartre defines it as a nihilating force attracted to being and capable of the affirmation or denial of this being. Sartre bases this on his principle that "all negation is determination." Because man can control his relationship with being through the nihilating capacity of the for-itself (human consciousness) he is free.

Man's freedom is such that he is not free not to be free. He must choose, Sartre says. Because he is always free to change his mind, man can never rest secure in his convictions or in his beliefs. He must continually recreate them.

In Sartre's system, man has replaced God at the center of the universe. He is its new source of meaning and value. Therefore, his very being is an ethical being. On this basis, Sartre concludes that an ethical structure arises automatically out of the ontological structure of the for-itself.

We are unable to accept Sartre's conclusions for three major reasons. First, his notion of the for-itself as the explanation for human consciousness has not been presented in such a way as to make it acceptable or even comprehensible. Secondly, viability of his concepts of freedom and value is placed in doubt because they are grounded in the theory of the for-itself, which when defined as an empty force, is self-contradictory. Thirdly, his notion of value has been necessari-

ly so limited to allow for its inclusion in his ontology that it is not capable of supporting an ethic.

Sartre describes human consciousness as the "nihilating for-itself", using the term 'nihilation' to introduce an active, creative element into the nothingness which he equates with consciousness. Assigning a creative power to nothingness generates two problems, however. Its presence must be justified and its origin given.

Sartre has taken no account of the much hackneyed point in the history of philosophy to the effect that only substances can have attributes. This nihilating ability of consciousness is surely an attribute. If so, it can hardly belong to an empty consciousness, and Sartre cannot justify its presence there.

Sartre attempts to explain the origin of this creative force by saying that the for-itself has an irresistible affinity to the in-itself. The plausibility of the "magnetic attraction" metaphor is somewhat diminished, however, by the fact that Sartre has not explained why there should have been a separation of the for-itself from the in-itself in the first place, which would have generated this pull. One is reminded of Plato's account of Aristophane's explanation of the attraction between men and women stemming from the fact that they were once one and became separated through a moral fall.

If we overlook the embarrassment of substance which the nihilating act suggests in Sartre's notion of the for-itself, and if we accept his explanation of this act by an attraction to being-in-itself, we then confront an even more difficult problem. How is the for-itself able to direct itself to the in-itself in particularity?

Being-in-itself is a totality ontologically prior to consciousness, by the principle of intentionality. Consciousness apprehends it by constituting it as a lack. It does this by separating being from itself through the "secretion of a nothingness". But Sartre has no mechanism in his ontology which enables him to explain how consciousness is able to direct the "flow" of this nothingness. He therefore cannot explain the recognition by consciousness of particular beings. This weakness affects not only his ontology but also the epistemology and the ethics which he has based on it.

The ability to question and to judge, which is necessarily prior to choice and therefore value, depends upon the ability of the for-itself to direct itself specifically, either upon its own acts or upon a particular aspect of the in-itself. Therefore, without the possibility of recognizing being in particularity no ethic would be possible on the basis of Sartre's ontology.

The recognition of being in particularity is also a necessary pre-requisite to knowledge. Knowledge is by definition a directed activity of consciousness and as such it must be the product of a focus on particular being.

We must conclude that Sartre's "nihilating for-itself" is an unviable concept and is not an adequate basis for the grounding of his notions of freedom and value. For the purposes of argument we might be able to ignore this in order to enable us to consider the theoretical possibility of an ethic based on Sartre's meta-ethical concepts of freedom and value. However, we contend that for quite independent reasons, Sartre's notion of value as choice or "preference" is not able to support an ethic.

To imply that valuing is preferring is to imply a comparison. In terms of subjectivist ethics this would be a comparison of feelings and we have demonstrated that that is impossible in terms of Sartre's ontology because he cannot account for the simultaneous occurrence of feelings.

In any case, Sartre is more interested in an objectivist ethic and to that end he has defined value as

"The nihilation of what is and the positing of what ideally could be".

This definition suggests that standard which is imperative to objectivist ethics but because of the impossibility of simultaneous multiple intentionalities in the sphere of human relationships this comparison which is a necessary part of any appeal to a standard is impossible. The only other place to look for this standard (I am reading what "ideally could be" as what "ought to be") is in consciousness which has been defined as nothingness.

What "ought to be" is a relative measure which can only exist through comparison to something which is. If, as Hume has suggested, the possibility of deriving an "ought" from an "is" is debatable, then, the possibility of deriving an "ought" from an "is not" (that is, the nihilating for-itself) is surely out of the question!

In a determined effort to find the profundity which we were sure must lie beneath the obscurity of Sartre's thought, we have painstakingly stripped Being and Nothingness of its guise. But, as Queen Victoria said, when the kilted Scots soldier on parade fell down in front of her, "We are not impressed".

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